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261112Z May 06

UNCLAS YEREVAN 000721

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: A1-PLUS FAILS YET AGAIN TO WIN FREQUENCY

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) The independent television and media company A1-Plus failed to win a radio frequency in the latest of its recurrent attempts to resume broadcasts. The National Commission on Television and Radio (NCTR, a regulatory body appointed by President Robert Kocharian) rejected the A1-Plus application for one of two radio frequencies put out for tender. As on previous occasions, the Commission announced that A1-Plus's competitors submitted stronger bids. A1-Plus representatives dismissed the explanation, alleging that the NCTR members simply backed up a political decision of the authorities not to provide A1-Plus with any frequencies. Mediamax head (and member of the NCTR) told us, however, that the case was less clear cut: he noted that the two winning bids offered more money for development than A1-Plus, and that both included more in-house production as part of their bids. A1-Plus had proposed a news radio format, while the two successful bidders proposed formats strictly devoted to entertainment.

2. (SBU) The commission voted unanimously to give both frequencies to little-known companies. One of the frequency winners, Ullis Media, is based at the Yerevan premises of the Armenian Public Radio, nevertheless its chief executive said the company simply rents office space there but has no ties with the government-controlled broadcaster. Local press has linked the other winner, Radio Pro, with Prime Minister Andranik Markarian's Republican Party. (Note: A1-Plus, the only national channel that was not loyal to the Kocharian administration, was forced off the air in April 2002 just hours after losing a first-ever frequency tender. It has since participated in eleven other tenders for television and radio frequencies and lost all of them. End Note.)
EVANS